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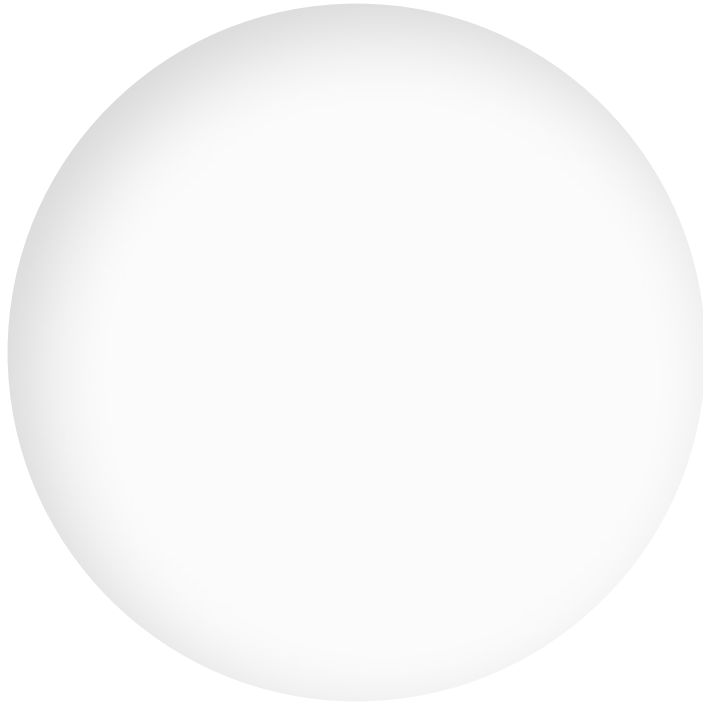
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An Unfinished Compendium of Materials

FROM THE INSIDE

KNOWING



Edited by Rachel Harkness

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TURF
Tanja Romankiewicz¹

The Past: redeposited

Knap of Howar, Neolithic

A windswept island, no more trees, only stone and sand, grass and sea: Papa Westray, Orkney, 3400 BC. But the grass is green, to graze the first cattle, the first sheep (Ritchie 1983, 56–7). The grass grows green, roots grow dense, around the sand, around the ginger-brown stone, worked into a sharp, narrow blade, then lost by the first farmer (ibid., 84–5).

Only stone and sand to build a farmhouse? The grass grows green, on walls held by stones on either side (Loveday 2006, 89). The first sheep graze on the wall-heads of the first home (Fig. 1; Ritchie 1983, 56).

Dark inside, but warm. Warm burns the grass and its roots and soils. Light and heat from the turf, absorbed by the turf of the walls. What could be more ubiquitous in this life, more sustaining? The sods that feed the beasts, feed the fire, keep in the fire’s heat, keep up the roof; absorb sound, water and urine, dung and dirt, steam and spill.

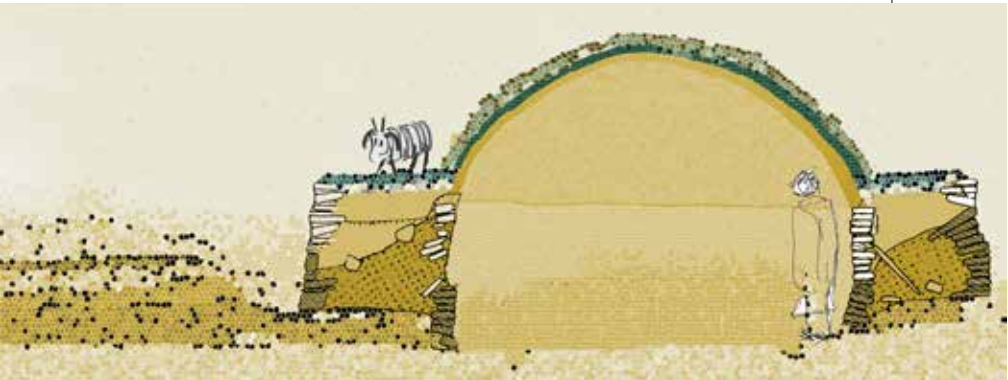
Deer’s Den, Bronze Age

A field of barley, golden in the autumn sun. Now only a memory, as the stone plough cuts through the stubble, as lumps of turf get ploughed in and under. Another wooden cart arrives, more turf, dripping with dung, urine, soot, ash, nutrients. Turfs, enriched from keeping the cattle inside over the winter, bedding them on the same grass they feasted on in the autumn sun. Ploughing in the rich resource: from this will grow the golden barley (Holden 2004), as golden as the bronze blade that will eventually cut it. It is 1,400 BC, on a gentle slope above the floodplain of the Don: Deer’s Den, Aberdeenshire.

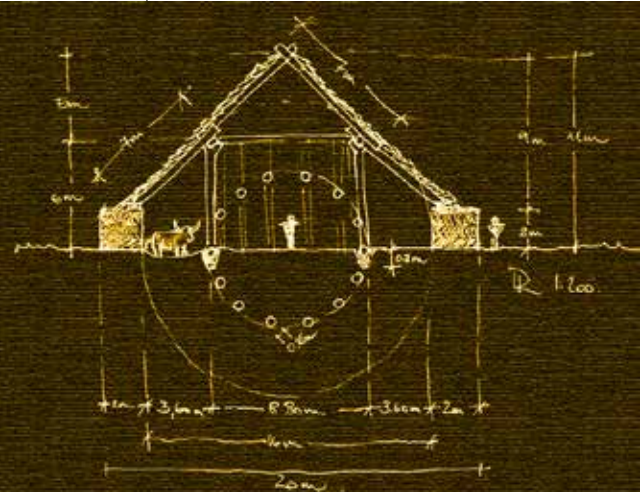
The plough jumps. Up! Up, over the earthen bank, decayed roots, dark soil, over all that remains from the once tall wall, built of grass, and roots and soil (Alexander 2000, 68–9). In sinks the plough beyond the wall. Into the soft deposits that once formed the house floor, into the hearth in the centre of the roundhouse, pushing material into the gully on its periphery where the cattle kept warm over the winter (Fig. 2). In sinks the plough, into the traces of life that once filled this roundhouse: pots, stone tools, trace elements, nutrients. This house is not old and exhausted but a treasured resource. Enriched from the life it housed, from stories and memories, residues from children’s laughter, and children’s nappies, from brother and father, and mother and sister, from dogs and mice, from sheep and cattle. Rich now, this vessel that received all this life, rich to sustain life in a different form, is transformed, into the garden plot, the rich infield for the most demanding crop. The house, once home, now ploughed, to house the seeds of new life, for a new life. As round as the house is, the cycle turns. A cycle of building, dwelling, enriching, abandoning, ploughing, and growing, reaping, then building a new roundhouse on this spot to start again (Fig. 3).

Birnie, Iron Age

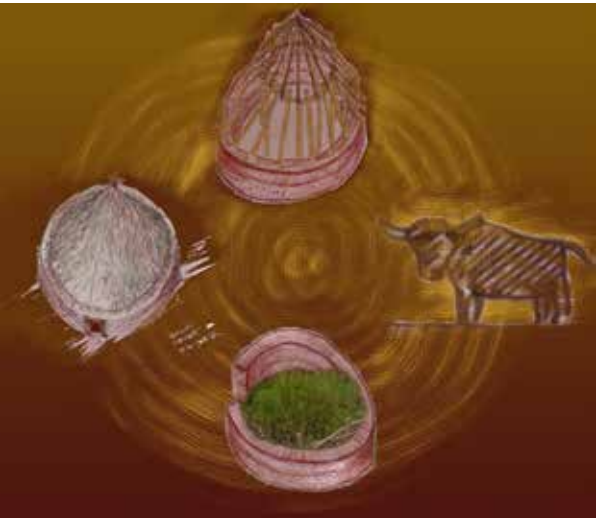
A field of barley, golden in the autumn sun. Even more golden as it reflects the golden flames. In the blink of an eye, the collapse. The cracking noise of timbers aching and failing, the thumping of the turf roof collapsing onto the flames. They die to amber, golden, in the autumn sun. The turf walls collapse on top, and the house, once with in all its height and beauty, is now a heap of steaming soil, reduced to a smoulder, a charcoal kiln (Fig. 4). Turf cooks: red and pink, orange and brown. It buries the timber, black as night, dark as pitch. Life comes to an end, but so does decay. Cooked and charred, the house will now be there, perhaps forever. It is the turf that shuts out oxygen, burying flames, and memories and stories, all. Still rich, still enriched, still



Schematic reconstruction drawing through a later prehistoric roundhouse with turf wall and animals stalled inside, northeast Scotland, T. Romankiewicz, 2017



Circular economy, Bronze-Age-style: building a circular dwelling house, which deforms under use and turns into a byre, enriching its walls and floors with nutrients, then using this site as a garden plot, before building a new house on the same spot to start the cycle all over again, T. Romankiewicz, 2017



A turf house – decaying, burnt, T. Romankiewicz, 2009/17



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visible, still detectable: at Birnie, Moray.²

No. 39 Arnol, 1836

A sheep grazing on the wall-head after the long, dark winter inside the black house (Fig. 5). The turf walls had kept them warm, but muffled everything, light, sound, wind. So proud, the walls, held by stones on either side; new grass just shooting up on its head, so delicious! Bring down that sheep, bring down that wall, and onto the wooden cart (Holden, 2004: 45). Here arrives another cart: more turf, dripping with dung, urine, soot, ash, nutrients. Turf, enriched from keeping the beasts inside over the winter, bedding them on the same grass they feasted on in the autumn sun. Now ploughing-in the rich resource, from which will grow the golden barley: 180 years ago, on the machair, Arnol, Isle of Lewis.

PRESENT: rediscovered

Birnie, 2010

The golden autumn sun reflects on the yellow machine: the toothless ditching bucket eats into the turf. Underneath, the golden sand, and black as night, dark as pitch, the charred timbers; and the colourful cooked turf. The trowel strokes across the soft, silty, silky soil (Fig. 6). Patterns appear. A chequer board of flattened turf wall. Digging deeper, sampling the soil, wrapping the charcoal, studying and dissecting – to tease out memories and stories – then keeping it, in the museum store, perhaps forever, to preserve what is left of the turf round-house.³

Deer’s Den, 1996

A field of barley, golden in the autumn

2 Excavations at Birnie by F Hunter, National Museum Scotland: <http://www.nms.ac.uk/collections-research/collections-departments/scottish-history-and-archaeology/dr-fraser-hunter/> Research repository: <http://repository.nms.ac.uk/cgi/search/simple?screen=Search>

3 Interactive roundhouse interpretation <http://www.nms.ac.uk/explore/games/build-a-roundhouse/>.

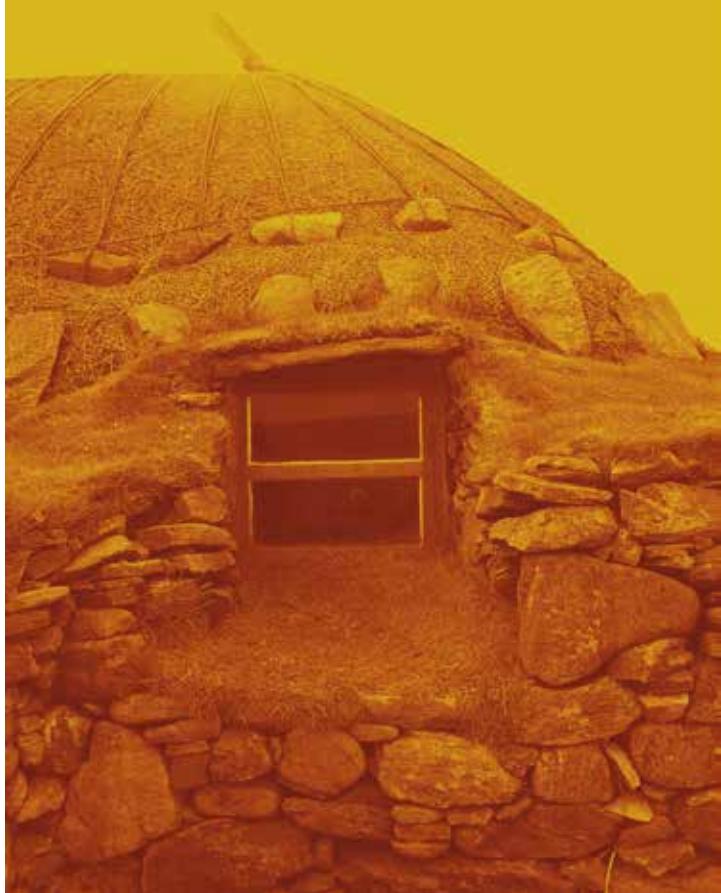
sun. Now only a memory, as the toothless ditching bucket cuts away the topsoil. Underneath, the golden sand, and brown and grey, the blobs of postholes, the curvilinear streak that demarcates the gully on the periphery and the outer edge of the roundhouse. No hint of the outer wall surviving? The trowel strokes across the soft, silty, silky soil. Finds appear. What looks like a half-digested Weetabix becomes a piece of ceramic crucible that once held molten bronze. More finds. Chipped, grey stones, worked by a Neolithic farmer. Then questions. But how? Bronze Age bronze and Neolithic flint? A round house built in the Neolithic when everybody else lived in rectangular ones? Then it still standing after more than thousand years in order to house a Bronze Age metal worker? The archaeologist is puzzled.

Yet the turf holds the answers, memories and stories. Roots had grown dense, around the sand, around the grey, worked stone, lost long before the Bronze Age smith arrived (Alexander 2000, 22). Yet the turf remembers. It retains. Cut from an area where flint was knapped, it carries these stories into the new Bronze Age house (Fig. 7), to confuse the modern archaeologist, years later, with the layers of life it has absorbed.

Yet the turf is also a chameleon. Unburnt at Deer’s Den, it remains the same colour as the soil which came to overlay the house, which filled ditches and hollows, which was ploughed at the time and ploughed ever since. The turf chameleon disappears into the soil. Only the non-decaying memories, stones, charcoal, soil colour, ever-and-ever smaller petrified plant remains, allow the archaeologist to recognise the turf’s traces, its memories, its stories.

Crew annex, University of Edinburgh, 2016

Golden in the summer’s sun? More a pale, unhealthy yellow. The fridge is cold and dark. Suffocating. Wrapped in foil, there is no air to breath, grow or decay (Fig. 8). The spatula scratches, scales weigh, ceramic dishes heat up. Hot, too hot. Sweating,



The turf wall head at Arnol, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, T Romankiewicz, 2005

Digging turfs for a Clayfest, Errol, Perthshire, Scotland, T Romankiewicz, 2015



The turf from the Birnie roundhouse under excavation, F Hunter, 2009



Wrapped turfs waiting for analysis, T. Romankiewicz, 2016

steaming, the fresh turf samples dry off all their moisture. Weighed again, and heated again. Heated? Burnt! To ash, to get rid of all organic compounds. The laboratory seeks to halt the turf’s decay. It extracts the turf’s life, moisture, root content, in order to understand the turf itself, its strength and weaknesses, its architectural merits.

FUTURE: reused

???

The toothed ditching bucket brings down the walls, eats into the concrete slab. The bitumen roof collapses. This house is old and exhausted, unlivd in, unloved. Children’s laughter echoed hollow from these walls that could not hold life’s stories. Nappies lie, not decaying, in the landfill. Poor now, the empty house shell cannot sustain life in any other form. Its lumps will meet the nappies in the landfill, where they will be, perhaps forever. Life happens elsewhere now.

Questions. What if our houses ended up not old and exhausted, but enriched with the life they once housed, the stories and memories? Residues from children’s laughter, and children’s nappies, from brother and father, and mother and sister, from dogs and mice. Rich then, they’d be vessels to receive all this life. Rich to sustain life in a different form, transformed. Into the compost heap, to grow courgettes or cavolo nero. The house, once home, now spaded in and under, to house the plan(t)s of new life, for a new life. As turfed as the walls of prehistory, it, too, could join the cycle of building, dwelling, enriching, abandoning, and growing, reaping, reusing, rebuilding again (Fig 9).

Turf – its grass, its roots – can still grow around sand, into a wall, a roof. It can enrich with nutrients and grow into a new life. Sustainable, renewable, it is full of stories and memories (Romankiewicz, 2016). Turf: for the future architects to build with, and the future archaeologists to disentangle.

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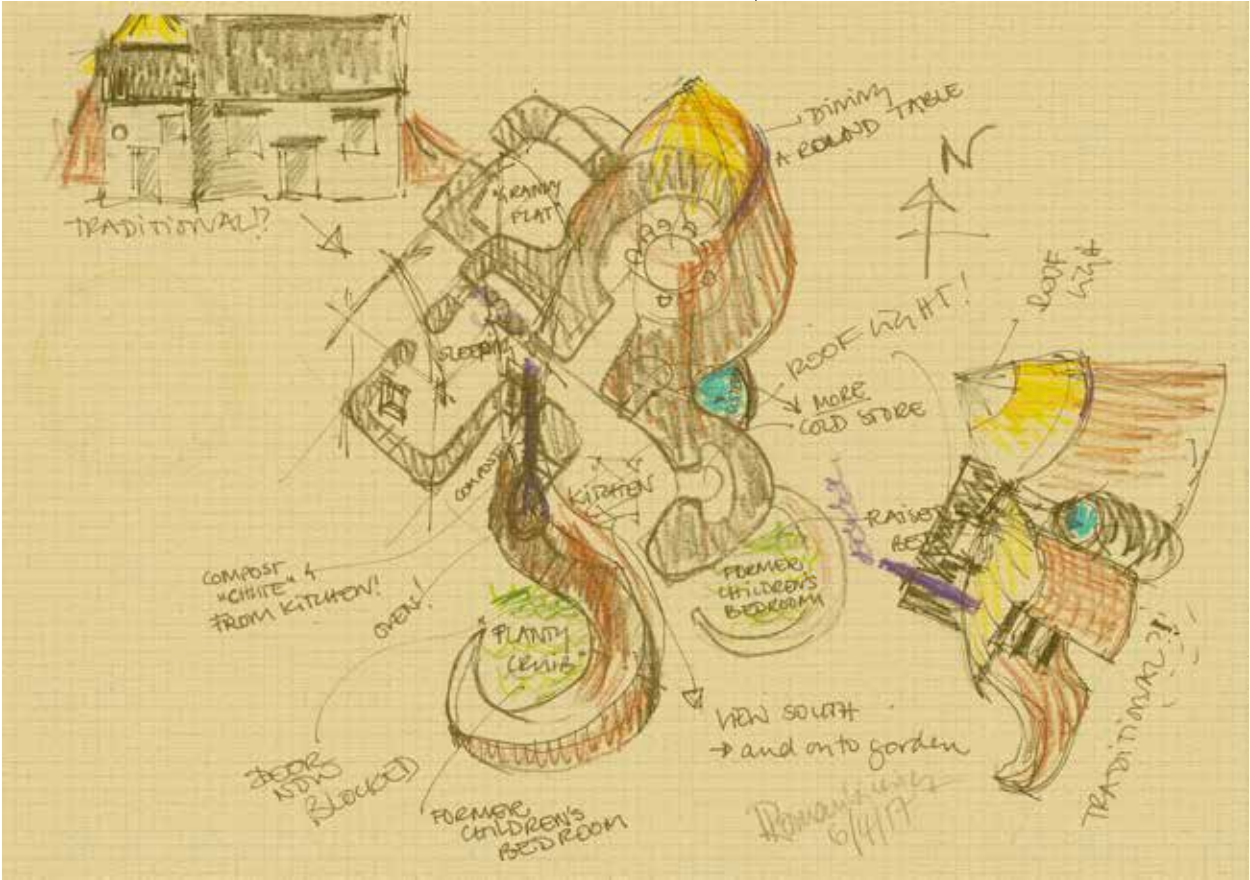
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Thinking on paper, T. Romankiewicz, 2017

AFTERWORD

This book has been put together over 2016 and 2017 as part of a project called *Knowing From the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design* (KFI for short) which commenced in June 2013, and will run until May 2018. Based in the Anthropology Department at the University of Aberdeen, the project is led by Professor Tim Ingold and is funded by a European Research Council Advanced Grant.

The contributors to the book are in many cases members of the KFI project: anthropologists, architects, choreographers, dancers, artists, and many people who work between and across a good number of disciplines and practices. Others include a number of the guests of and visitors to the project between 2013 and 2017, and importantly, also people that the project members have worked with in the course of their KFI research. The contributions themselves respond to a brief – generated within the project’s discussions and activities – of speaking to the themes of traces, materials and future-making. As such, the book itself traces some of the themes of the project and connections between people, places, topics of interest, and moves beyond them, out into the world. The original invitation for contributions was consciously open in terms of format, in order to allow for experimentation and a creativity that might reflect the project’s interdisciplinary context and make-up, and though contributors were asked to focus on a particular material, the interpretations of that focus vary widely. It is hoped that this variety, coupled with the unfinished-ness of the Compendium, will speak to the simple fact that investigation, knowledge and understanding of the world around us takes many forms, as can its representation and communication. What unites the entries in the Compendium is the idea that knowledge grows from our practical and observational engagement with the world around us. It comes from thinking *with*, *from* and *through* beings and things, not just *about* them. Finally, with the wider project, there is also a discernable

thread overall aim is to show how research underpinned by this premise could make a difference to the sustainability of environmental relations and to the well-being that depends on it.

An Unfinished Compendium of Materials has been a joy to put together. The opportunity to have such freedom with a book’s shape and content is quite unusual, and editing something that would hopefully reflect the rich diversity of the KFI project as well as some of its shared sensibilities, has been challenging but ultimately very rewarding. It has meant that I have been surprised and delighted by the creative contributions people have offered to the Compendium. I gratefully thank all of the contributors for the work they have shared and hope that others may now enjoy them too. Wherever the copies of this *Unfinished Compendium* now go, carried along in the life-courses of people, I hope that they will be critically and creatively engaged with and perhaps even added to, and that they will continue to inspire.

Rachel Harkness, May 2017

CONTRIBUTORS

Ábrán Ágota is a Ph.D. student at the University of Aberdeen writing up her research on the process of plants entering natural remedy commodity chains in Romania, where she is from. She is interested in human and nonhuman entanglements especially concerning healing practices.

Gey Pin Ang is a Singaporean actress, pedagogue and director. Ang holds a PhD in Drama by Practice-as-Research from University of Kent, UK. She performed lead roles and toured with the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Italy. Since 2006, Ang has initiated the *Sourcing Within* project where she tours performances and teaches internationally.

Mike Anusas is a designer, educator and social anthropologist. His work is concerned with developing practices of knowing and making that are ‘beyond object’, open-ended and that enhance senses of dialogue and correspondence with materials and energy. He works with the University of Strathclyde and the University of Aberdeen.

Malcolm Atkins is a European lapsed Marxist composer/performer perturbed by the corporatisation of learning and the privatisation of compassion instrumental in the decline of the small island he inhabits. His main interest is in bringing communities together through sharing the combinations of sounds and movements that define our cultural identities.

Joseph Calleja (b.1981, Malta) is a practicing visual artist and a current member of Lateral Lab. His work was shortlisted for Saatchi and Channel 4 New Sensations 2010 and selected for the RSA New Contemporaries 2011. He was the first recipient of the Robert Callender Residency for Young Artists.

Jennifer Clarke is a Lecturer at Gray’s School of Art. She has a background in the arts and a PhD in anthropology. Her research, teaching, and public work

combines and explores the borders of anthropology, philosophy and contemporary art practice.

Anne Douglas writes on drawing from within a drawing practice and from the perspective of improvisation. Trained as a sculptor, she has over the past twenty years focused on developing research approaches to the practice of art, in particular the changing place of the artist in public life. Within KFI she has collaborated with Dr Amanda Ravetz and Christine Moderbacher exploring drawing in relation to filming and with Paulo Maccagno, Marc Higgen and Nicola Chambury experiencing drawing in relation to the concept of ‘whiteout’ as an experience of coping with and breaking through profound disorientation.

Sally Duguid graduated from Painting at Grays School of Art in 2015. Sally continues to live and work in Aberdeen and currently holds a studio at The Anatomy Rooms.

Paola Esposito is an anthropologist whose main research interest is the interplay of sensory perception, movement and imagination. Paola specialises in *butoh* dance, but has worked with performers and makers from different artistic backgrounds. She cultivates her own creativity through a combination of expressive mediums including drawing, dance and film.

Kate Foster is a Scottish-based independent environmental artist. Biogeographies (see www.meansealevel.net) comprised a series of works on animal and human lives; current work focusses on land use, especially peatlands (see work in progress on www.inthepresenttense.net).

Caroline Gatt is a Research Fellow (Knowing from the Inside) at the University of Aberdeen. Her forthcoming book is entitled ‘An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth’ (Routledge). From 2001 to date, Gatt has carried out training and research in laboratory theatre, with groups in Malta, Italy and the UK.

Paolo Gruppuso is Honorary Research Fellow at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Aberdeen. He is interested in environmental conservation, landscape, agriculture and wetland management. He has conducted ethnographic research in two protected wetlands in Agro Pontino (Italy), on topics including environmental conflicts, water management, and environmental education.

Rachel Harkness is a Lecturer in Design and Screen Cultures at Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh. Her research and teaching explores architecture and design as a peopled process, pays particular attention to the social life of the materials involved, and considers how people make manifest their ecological designs for living.

Marc Higgin is a research fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. His current research is with visual artists and their practices of making, following the different contexts, each with their own regime of value, through which materials and things are transformed into works of art.

Elizabeth A Hodson is a research affiliate on the project ‘Knowing from the Inside’ based in the Anthropology Department at the University of Aberdeen. Her work focuses on contemporary art and in particular drawing, with a regional interest in Iceland and Scotland. She holds a studio at Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.

Sophie Hueglin is an archaeologist from Germany, who does research on medieval mortar production technologies in England, Switzerland and Italy. More generally, she is interested in the theoretical concept of petrification, a process that for example can be observed in the change from wood to stone in early medieval architecture.

Tim Ingold is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, and Principal Investigator for the ERC-funded Knowing From the Inside

project. His current interests lie on the interface between anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture. Recent books include *The Perception of the Environment* (2000), *Lines* (2007), *Being Alive* (2011), *Making* (2013) and *The Life of Lines* (2015).

Leonidas Koutsoumpos is assistant professor of Theory in Architectural Design at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, Greece. His research has been exploring the designing processes through philosophical and ethnomethodological inquiries. He is also practicing architecture through by and constructing projects in various scales.

Valeria Lembo is Honorary Research Fellow at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Aberdeen, where she is carrying out research in collaboration with the project Knowing From the Inside. Her current work is exploring the interplay between breathing, linearity and skilled practice by experimentally engaging with embroidery, singing and movement awareness techniques.

Jan Peter Laurens Loovers (Ph.D., Aberdeen, 2012) is an ERC Arctic Domus post-doctoral fellow at the University of Aberdeen. Since 2005 he has been working with Gwich’in in northern Canada on pedagogy, ecology, and dogs, amongst other themes. Jan Peter Laurens Loovers wants to acknowledge the Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute, Annie Jane Modeste, and Rachel Joy Harkness for their assistance and the community of Fort McPherson for their kindness and teachings. The contributions (Furs, Iron Ore, Mooseskin, and Red Ochre) have been made possible by financial support from the Royal Anthropological Institute’s Urgent Anthropology Fund and the Arctic Domus ERC Advanced Grant.

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Anthropology. Lucas is author of *Research Methods for Architecture* (2016), *Drawing Parallels* (2018), and *Anthropology for Architects* (2018). Lucas’ current research includes ‘graphic anthropologies’ on marketplaces in South Korea and urban festivals in Japan, describing the informal, social, and iterative architecture through the conventions of architectural drawing.

Enrico Marcoré is a PhD candidate for the University of Aberdeen in the ERC project “Knowing from the Inside”. His research focuses on the rebuilding of the L’Aquila province after the 2009 earthquake. Through considering many forms of dwelling arisen from the quake, he wants to explore the role of building in the making of Aquilean post-catastrophic environment.

Francesca Marin is PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. Her work focuses on interdisciplinary research, collaborative processes, conservation and small-scale fisheries. In Argentina, she works with marine biologists. Beforehand she did fieldwork in Kenya and Cameroon, in collaboration with volcanologists, cartographers and NGO members, studying risk perception, vulnerability and development.

Germain Meulemans is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the Universities of Liège and Aberdeen. He is interested in hybrid, anthropogenic environments, and in the challenge they pose to both the natural and the social sciences. Recently, he has been conducting ethnographic research on the topic of urban soils.

Christine Moderbacher is an Anthropologist and Documentary Filmmaker. (Harraga 2008, Men at work 2010, A Letter to Mohamed 2013, A Summer in Nigeria (in progress)). She is currently finishing her PhD “CRAFTING LIVES in Brussels - Making and Mobility on the Margins” at the department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, as part of the project KFI - Knowing From the Inside. In her films as well as her anthropological work she focuses

on migratory and marginal worlds as well as visual and textual storytelling.

Claire Pençak is a choreographer and dancer whose practice extends beyond the studio and theatre to working in an interdisciplinary context. Her work may materialise as performance, installation, writings from improvisation and place making projects. www.clairepencak.wordpress.com

Tanja Romankiewicz first trained as an architect, interested in the people of the past. She is now an archaeologist, interested in how past people created their built environment. Her current project, a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship at University of Edinburgh, investigates how we can be ‘Building (Ancient) Lives’.

Griet Scheldeman, an anthropologist from Belgium, and **Doug Benn**, a glaciologist from Scotland, met in 2012 on a glacier in Spitsbergen. Since then they have explored their mutual passion for ice, bringing together scientific and artistic perspectives in a holistic appreciation of ‘solid water’ in all its forms. They now live by the sea in Scotland.

Cristián Simonetti is Assistant Professor at the Programa de Antropología, Instituto de Sociología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen. His work concentrates on how bodily gestures and environmental forces relate to notions of time in science, the topic of a monograph entitled *Sentient Conceptualizations* (Routledge, 2017).

Erika Akariguame Armengol Sloth has studied social anthropology at Goldsmiths University of London, environmental anthropology at University of Aberdeen and is currently studying development studies at London School of Economics, (where she is working on a research project regarding material cultures in developing countries).

Undine Stabrey currently focuses on pedagogical knowledge (at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Northwestern Switzerland) as well as on the phenomenon of water (at the Center for Global Studies of the University of Berne). In addition to research in Ancient World Studies and Philosophy of Science, she develops an archaeology of digital things in order to explain the formation of prognostic structures.

Jo Vergunst is a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. His research interests are in rural society and landscapes in Scotland and Europe, including farming, walking and environmental art. His current fieldwork is on traditional woodwork and forest management.

Judith Winter is an independent curator, social researcher and senior lecturer at Manchester School of Art. She was inaugural curator for the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), UK and Head of Arts for DCA, Scotland. Her curatorial approach is sensitive to the ephemeral qualities of works-in-progress and cross-disciplinary practices. Her current research and teaching returns to the Bauhaus as a crucible of the modern art school. By revisiting the reservoir of material experimentation, she hopes to link students separated by a century and consider the contemporary relevance of its approaches for future generations.

